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[How To Demoralize The Faculty: A Six-Step Program That Works](#)

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HOW TO DEMORALIZE THE FACULTY: A SIX-STEP PROGRAM THAT WORKS

Howard B. Altman

Faculty morale is too high. Something must be done. According to recent surveys, more than three quarters of the faculty at American colleges and universities are pleased that they chose to become professors (as opposed to stock brokers or corporate attorneys, for example). The predicted mass exodus of older faculty from academia is not happening. Obviously, our institutional Vice Presidents for Faculty Demoralization are not performing at a satisfactory level.

Following the six-step program outlined below guarantees a marked increase in dissatisfaction and demoralization among the vast majority of your faculty members, regardless of their academic rank, tenure status, gender, disciplinary background, race, religion, political affiliation, or sexual orientation. Fail to follow these steps assiduously and you, too, can find yourself trying to run a campus burdened by too many contented professors.

1. Close down the lines of communication. Never let the rank and file faculty members know the issues facing the campus, at least until it's too late for them to do anything about them. Never solicit input or feedback from the faculty to your ideas for change in the way the institution operates. If you run a large institution, you may have to share these ideas with the faculty senate (or with whatever body of the faculty has governance responsibility), but make certain that the other ninety percent of the faculty never hear from you. If faculty members on your campus go to the trouble of sending you unsolicited letters or emails with their well-intentioned, insightful, or asinine suggestions, never acknowledge that you've even received this correspondence. Nothing so demoralizes a faculty member as discovering that the campus administration is a black hole in space from which no responses are ever received.
2. Never thank anyone for anything. Never let your faculty members think you appreciate the work they are doing. Never send anyone a personal thank-you note. Dedicated faculty service on institutional committees should always be taken for granted and never acknowledged. Never, ever, phone a faculty member personally to express your congratulations for a significant accomplishment (e.g., winning an award, publishing a major work, nomination for outstanding teaching, election to an office in a national professional association, etc.); the two minutes you spend on the phone with a professor would set back standards for demoralization on your campus for years! Never let the faculty think YOU think they're sufficiently productive (whatever

that means!).

3. Always pay outside hires more than their inside colleagues. Make sure the faculty in a department find out that the new assistant professor you've just hired is getting paid more than colleagues who have been diligently working in that department for years. Spread the word that the institution has been given (or has allocated) money to fund high-salary endowed chairs for distinguished scholars or teachers, but no inside candidates need apply. This works wonders!
4. Stay invisible. Avoid being seen on your campus as much as possible. "Management by walking around" can severely undermine demoralization efforts, especially if you cheerfully greet those faculty members you encounter and pause to chat with them as one human being to another. Make sure that any faculty member whom you need to see, or who needs to or wants to see you, always has to come to your office and, if the request for a meeting is the faculty member's, has to wait weeks for an appointment. If possible, have your secretary postpone that appointment at the last minute because something has come up. Don't have lunch where the faculty eat. Don't show up at department-sponsored events (concerts, plays, exhibits, guest lectures, etc.). Under no conditions should you have "open door" office hours where any faculty member who wants to talk can drop in. In fact, try to keep your office door closed at all times lest a faculty member walking by notice that you actually work. (The presumption that administrators don't really work, and are compensated for this with much higher salaries and better parking places, is the bedrock of faculty demoralization. You certainly don't want to undermine THAT!)
5. Keep the workings of the faculty reward system secret. Faculty members should never know what you expect of them for promotion or tenure or salary increases. The more the criteria and standards for acceptable faculty performance can be left unspecified or kept vague, the easier it is for you to make a personnel decision which no one else will understand, and the more the faculty can be kept in a state of perpetual stress. In addition, never allow the different conceptions of professional work published by most of our scholarly associations to influence your judgment; a chemistry professor is an art historian is an English teacher—make them all perform equally if they wish to be promoted (but of course let "market pressures" be your excuse for not paying them equally). Never risk enhancing faculty loyalty and undermining demoralization efforts by institutionalizing any so-called "non-traditional faculty rewards" (such as awarding someone a reserved parking space, providing extra clerical support, granting travel or faculty development money, purchasing new office equipment for someone, new instructional software, etc.) Always let the faculty know you have put aside salary money for matching "outside offers"; this policy not only encourages professors to spend their time looking for positions elsewhere, but has the splendidly demoralizing effect of letting all faculty know that their value to their institution increases only if they can prove some other college or university wants them.
6. Change everything frequently. Never let the faculty get too used to anything. Restructure the curriculum. Change the reward system. Develop a new departmental structure. Create new faculty performance expectations. Tighten the budget annually so that the faculty are constantly stressed; announcing a "reallocation" is one of the best administrative tools to enhance demoralization. Call for increased faculty accountability. Develop yet another form for evaluating teaching. Annually reduce faculty health care benefits and increase their cost. Hint about the need for increased faculty productivity; maybe the teaching load ought to be raised. Increase class sizes and raise

the minimum number of students for a class to “make.” Continue to appoint lots of time-consuming faculty committees which generate lots of reports whose ideas never get implemented. Survey the faculty frequently and never let them know how the surveys come out. Change degree requirements. Redo the institutional mission statement. Bring in new academic leaders every couple of years and make sure they have a different philosophy from that of their predecessors.

This six-step program is foolproof. Any academic administrator with half a brain can do it! No need to thank me; my demoralization is thanks enough.

Howard B. Altman is Professor of Modern Languages and Linguistics and a Faculty Development Specialist at the University of Louisville. He hopes his institution’s administration will know that they have not been the models for this satiric look at faculty demoralization.

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